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THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE EXPLORATION AND PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

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Abstract of the national paper of France

1. The holding of the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III) on the eve of the twenty-first century, 50 years after the conquest of space first began, affords us an opportunity to take stock of this major episode in the history of humankind and to attempt to map its future prospects and implications.

2. A primary task of the Conference is to review the new trends that have appeared since the previous United Nations space conference was held, 17 years ago, and which are the outcome of two far-reaching changes that have taken place in the intervening period: on the one hand, a shift in the global geostrategic situation, marked by the end of the cold war era and the emergence of new space Powers, giving renewed impetus to international cooperation, and, on the other, a proliferation of space technology applications and a greater awareness of the effects that human activity has on our planet and its consequences.

3. In practice, space technologies are being increasingly called upon to help solve problems facing humankind in such areas as environmental management, communications, transport safety, natural resource management and the organization of disaster relief. We are also witnessing the implementation of mini-satellite or micro-satellite programmes, making it possible to reduce satellite development, launch and operating costs and thereby facilitate the access of a greater number of countries to space programmes.

4. Also, space-related activities are increasingly becoming part of the economic sector. The development of innovations is being undertaken with the constant concern to demonstrate the competitiveness of space-based solutions and those activities are being carried out to an ever greater extent within the sphere of private enterprise.

5. The work of UNISPACE III should not, however, be confined to a review of such developments and their implications; it should also consider how the new trends can be applied for the benefit of the greatest number and of the peoples of the developing countries in particular.

6. Those developments have been taken into account in the approaches adopted by France, which is one of the Powers actively engaged in furthering the peaceful uses of outer space, primarily in support of economic development:

(a) France has from the outset sought to incorporate a substantial part of its space research programmes within a framework of international cooperation focusing exclusively on peaceful activities. In particular through the Centre national d'études spatiales (CNES), it currently plays a major role within the European Space Agency (ESA), which is making Europe a leading space Power, in particular in the field of launcher vehicles of the Ariane series, in the satellite field, in the field of ground equipment through the creation of a space

industry of international dimensions and in the area of advances in scientific knowledge (science of the universe, Earth sciences and environmental science);

(b) Both within ESA, where it is the major contributor, and also on a national level, through CNES, France is directly involved in many programmes in cooperation with the other space Powers;

(c) France, which pursues an active policy in support of development, would like greater attention to be accorded to the use of space technologies for development purposes, so that an increasing number of countries will be able to take advantage of those technologies in their own economic and social development.

7. With regard to French space policy, five priorities have been adopted. The aims of those priorities, which are being implemented primarily under the responsibility of CNES, are to develop new applications and meet users' expectations:

(a) Adaptation, with its partners within ESA, of the Ariane-5 launcher to market developments, in terms of cost and performance, in order to preserve European autonomy of access to space;

(b) Development of a new generation of optical or radar-based Earth observation satellites and advancement of scientific research work on data interpretation in order to reduce costs and maintain Europe's strong position in this sector;

(c) Improved knowledge of the solar system, with emphasis on the planet Mars and the Mars sample return mission in cooperation with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration of the United States of America; this extremely ambitious mission should have important consequences in the area of Earth sciences and studies on the origins of life;

(d) Support for the economic development of the satellite location and telecommunications sector, in particular through private initiative project partnerships, the European satellite navigation and positioning system project and distance learning and telemedicine activities;

(e) Development of a major research and technology programme with a view to designing and validating new systems and maintaining independent expertise.

8. France also attaches importance to space technology in its development cooperation policy, which is being pursued on a multilateral basis or through bilateral projects. In particular, France has undertaken activities in the areas of training for the benefit of developing countries and assistance for countries wishing to embark on space activities. The efforts of the developed countries should be focused essentially on strengthening the technical expertise of national and international development organizations, on promoting research in the fields of the environment and global change and on furthering space applications in disaster prevention and mitigation. In this last area, greater and coordinated use of available satellite resources is necessary.

9. Over the last decades, the United Nations, through its Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, has shown itself to be the appropriate forum for debating issues relating to the exploration and use of outer space. It is within this body that universally accepted legal norms have been successfully drawn up to form present-day space law.

10. It is also within this body that, in response to the new challenges posed by the development of space activities and technologies, work on defining new rules should be conducted in the future. The needs in this connection are genuine ones, whether they relate to improving the registration conditions, to limiting the production of space debris, to the intellectual property regime, in particular in connection with the operation of the international space station, to responsibility for positioning, navigation and time-tagging signals emitted in space from satellites or to space-related commercial activities. These few examples reflect

issues of common concern that should be addressed in a global forum, where every State has the right to be heard. France believes that space law should remain a multilateral law. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space should accordingly resume its role as the main body for defining common rules that meet common needs.

11. The Committee will be all the more able to discharge its function effectively if it can agree on arrangements that satisfy the expressed needs of the international community. We should therefore reflect on the method of functioning of the Committee, and especially of its Legal Subcommittee, and consider ways and means of tailoring its agenda to the real issues at stake, in line with the mandate of our international organization.

12. France will for its part continue to strive for the future advancement and development of space law as a component of international law. It will continue to cooperate fully over the coming years, as it has done in connection with the preparations for this Conference, in order to ensure that the results achieved with regard to the main economic, social and cultural interests involved in the use of outer space can be applied for the benefit of all.